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A century ago it was advocated that comprehensive studies on food and nutrition of man, be undertaken with the belief that scientifically based nutritional guidance could result in greater working efficiency and greater enjoyment of life. There followed a very productive period in which the concept of essential nutrients were developed. Fat soluble and water soluble vitamins were identified, isolated from food source and synthesized. The mechanisms of action of some of these were in the forefront of biochemical interest and activity in the period from 1915 to 1940. Trace elements were observed to have role as essential nutrients. Certain amino-acids were found to be necessary in the diet since the body is unable to synthesize them. Many of the biochemical systems involved in the absorption and utilization of food energy were worked out. The growth and development of humans as well as experimental animals were found to be dependent not only on quantitatively sufficient food, but also on qualitatively adequate diets providing appropriate amounts of some forty different nutrients. This new knowledge has thrown into clearer relief contribution which the science of nutrition can make to human welfare. The average height
of children on completing their schooling had increased by 2–3 inches in United Kingdom and infant mortality had decreased from 97 to 68 per 1000 live births. Health gains were attributed to improvement in the environment, but most importantly to a better and improved diet.

Deficiency of one or more nutrients in the growing individual may result in stunted growth and development. Such stunting although uncommon may be seen in intrauterine growth restriction (Morgan et al. 1978).

Malnutrition is a severe problem in the developing and underdeveloped countries. According to Bengoa (1974) 100 million children were suffering from malnutrition in the early seventies. Malnutrition may be due to a deficiency of protein (Kwashiorkor), a deficiency of calories (marasmus), or various combinations of both.

These types of malnutritions are generally referred to as protein-calorie malnutrition (PCM) (Viteri, et al. 1964, Latham 1974). Research on the effects of PCM on the developing human being is complicated by its occurrence in association with chronic infections, the possible influence of other socio-economic factors, and the lack of correct
information on the age of the individual (Scrimshaw et al. 1968, Delicardie & Cravioto 1974). The various organ systems are differently sensitive to specific nutritional inadequacies (Pfeiffer 1970, Venkataraman et al. 1983). During the last two decades much interest has been focused on the effects of malnutrition on various important organs like brain, heart gastrointestinal tract etc. This field of research has several important aspects. Some of these includes questions concerning their significance for the physical and mental development, vulnerable age periods and relative importance of different nutritional factors.